



*Ali: The Man, The Moves, The Mouth* (MVD Visual) has been re-released into a fist-pumping hour of American History action. It goes by so fast, it's a blur. There's Muhammad Ali, taunting White America, being the bad guy, suing the United States government and winning, all the while spouting poetry, Nation Of Islam platitudes and beating people up in the ring like no boxer ever. Narrated by beloved boxing historian Bert Sugar (1937-2012), which brings it a validity and gravitas that few others could achieve, this documentary compactly contains those jaw-dropping Ali moments both in the ring and on the mic.

After winning a gold medal at the 1960 Summer Olympics, Cassius Clay (as he was born in Louisiana) turned pro and immediately started stirring it up: "These fans are fools," he'd taunt. "I like to be booed!" He kept winning and backing it up, yet his path toward the World Heavyweight Championship would have to go through the baddest, nastiest, brutish bear of a man in Sonny Liston, who had knocked out champion Floyd Patterson twice, both in the first round. Clay didn't stand a chance and everyone knew it. His 1964 training camp in Miami was awash with celebrities, including The Beatles. That fight will forever be shrouded in mystery (as would the rematch). Liston simply refused to come out of his corner to start the eighth round, claiming a shoulder injury. There are those who will swear both fights were fixed: and when the fix is in, the winner usually doesn't know about it. Liston was mobbed up big time. Clay was young, pretty, fast, strong, and easily would have a future worth millions. Everyone assumed the fix was in and when it came time for a rematch, no city would touch the fight. It had to be staged all the way up in Lewiston, Maine, in the middle of nowhere. On May 25, 1965, Clay knocked out Liston in the very first round with a punch that never even touched him. Forever known as "The Phantom Punch," it sealed his fate as champ but what the mob couldn't know is that Clay would dance out of their reach forever by embracing The Nation Of Islam, changing his name to Muhammad Ali, telling startled reporters that "Cassius Clay is my slave name" and "I don't consider myself an American, I'm an African!"

Upon defending his championship against the tough Ernie Terrell, Ali showed his mean streak, a cruel propensity not only to win but to totally humiliate and emasculate his opponent. Terrell refused to call him Ali, kept calling him Clay. So

in the middle of the ring, with the world watching, Ali kept jabbing Terrell's face into a hideous mess, yelling at him with every punch, "WHAT'S MY NAME?" The so-called "what's my name" fight was an exercise in nastiness as Terrell had already been beaten but Ali continued to pepper him with punches while yelling at him. Cruelty had now been added to Ali's arsenal.

After losing twice to Liston, Patterson had won five straight to earn a title shot. Ali promptly ended his career. He kept taunting White America in interviews, so much so that the United States government had had enough of him and classified him I-A to be shipped to Viet Nam. He refused to go and was stripped of his championship. What should have been the best four years of his boxing career were lost. He was charged with draft evasion and sentenced to five years in jail. Appeals kept him out of prison and in 1971, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned his conviction. He had fought the law and the law didn't win.

Rusty, his timing off, he returned to the ring and still easily beat Jerry Quarry. Then, in 1971, "The Fight Of The Century" pitted him and his 31-0 record against Smokin' Joe Frazier (26-0 with 23 knockouts). In that fight, Ali suffered the first loss of his career. In fighting Ken Norton, Norton broke Ali's jaw in the first round yet he fought 11 more rounds to win the bout. He then beats Frazier in a rematch to earn a title shot against George Foreman, who had knocked Frazier down six times in winning the title. Foreman's uppercut was so great it had lifted Frazier up off the ground. The fight was in Zaire, Africa, and Ali regained the title. Ali then defended his title against a pug from Jersey. Chuck Wepner was known as "The Bayonne Bleeder." He was the original inspiration for Sylvester Stallone's *Rocky* character. Wepner wound up standing toe-to-toe with the greatest fighter in history, lived up to his name, but gave as much as he got. Ali still won. Four more title defenses ensued before Frazier and Ali clashed in what many historians call the greatest fight of all time. 14 rounds of pure hell, "The Thrilla In Manilla," with temperatures of over 120 degrees, the two men came out blazing in round one and didn't let up until Ali won again.

Then the decline.

That third fight against Frazier sucked the life right out of him. He would never be the same again. He looked fat and tired in beating Jimmy Young. His legs were gone. Then he loses to Leon Spinks, a much inferior fighter. Yet he beats Spinks in a rematch. He should retire but wins the title an unprecedented third time by beating the man who broke his jaw, Norton. Still, he gets beaten to a pulp by Larry Holmes, who keeps looking at the referee to stop it. He has trouble speaking after fights. His Parkinson's Disease sets in.

You hear it all, you see it all.



Tags: [mike greenblatt](#), [muhammad ali](#), [rant 'n' roll](#)

reader responses

1. I love the spirit of your piece on Ali. You have the essence right on, but the facts are a little bit off. No fault of your own, you probably are not old enough to remember every detail like an old guy like myself. For example, Muhammad didn't end Patterson's career until their second fight, he lost a split decision to Norton in the broken jaw fight, and he beat Spinks and not Norton to win the title for the third time. No big deal... like I said, your heart is in the right place.

[Barry Tesar](#) on 11/29/2012 at 11:14 AM

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